

City of San Antonio invests in opportunity youth with new West Side center



Vincent T. Davis | Feb. 22, 2019



Mayor Ron Nirenberg said disconnected youths in San Antonio come from every walk of life, every neighborhood and school district in the city.

Photo: Bob Owen /Staff file photo

The city and several partners are investing in out-of-school and unemployed youths between 16 and 24, opening a new re-engagement center on the West Side and funding a program to provide career guidance and training.

“These young people are on a precipice,” said Carolyn Watson, vice president of corporate responsibility for JPMorgan Chase. “And the right support, at the right time, could make all the difference for their futures.”

The company recently donated \$150,000 to Goodwill to help the population often called “opportunity youth.” The training program is designed to reach 30,000 young people, or 12 percent of the youths in San Antonio.

Mayor Ron Nirenberg said disconnected youths in San Antonio come from every walk of life, every neighborhood and school district in the city. He referenced a national study that said that 4.6 million young people across the nation are not in school or not working.

“The future of any community can be defined by the outcomes of its youth,” he said. “They reflect the promise of a city, but all too often they also reflect the challenges that it faces.”

Last spring, members of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas gathered to discuss the problem at the financial institution’s San Antonio office. They met with city leaders to talk about the issue and about establishing a city re-engagement center for opportunity youth.

The bank’s Alfreda B. Norman said the labor force is getting older and that engaging youths in the economy is important to the nation’s overall vitality.

The Frank Garrett Multi-Service Center, 1226 N.W. 18th St., was reopened last week after a six-month renovation. It now features a young adult outreach initiative, among other programs, and houses the NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center, overseen by the city’s Human Services Department.

Communities in Schools and Goodwill will work with the department to help eligible youths get back in school or find employment.

According to the city's website, \$760,000 was allocated in fiscal year 2019 budget to pay for the re-engagement center.

Andrew O. Moore from the National League of Cities said the local network of city departments, nonprofits and educational institutions joins cooperatives around the nation including in Boston, New York and Los Angeles.

He said San Antonio is the second city to use city funds to support re-engagement work. Moore said the idea for a re-engagement center began several years ago with Judge John Bull, who had worked with his team on juvenile justice reform.

"The re-engagement center will do their part to get them ready," Bull said. "We need the business community to meet us halfway and give these kids a chance."

He introduced a video that featured a young man named Jesse, who said what's fueled him is proving everybody wrong, to show that he could better himself and not be a statistic.

"The city is stepping up," Jesse says in the video, "helping other people to open doors that were closed."

City Manager Sheryl Sculley said the program will seek to help 600 youths in its first year.

“Our ultimate goal is to train these young adults for hard-to-fill jobs in our community,” she said, “and to give them the ... skills that our businesses need as well.”

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Vincent T. Davis started at the San Antonio Express-News in 1999 as a part-time City Desk Editorial Assistant working nights and weekends while attending San Antonio College and working on the staff of the campus newspaper, The Ranger. He completed a 3-month fellowship from the Freedom Forum Diversity Institute at Vanderbilt University in 2003 and earned his bachelors degree in communication design from Texas State University in 2006.

<https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/City-of-San-Antonio-invests-in-opportunity-youth-13638053.php>